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261326Z Apr 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000944

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#) [THIRDTERM](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS SEEK SUPPORT AFTER
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IS DEFEATED

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reason 1.4 (b)
and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: A group of National Assembly members opposed to a third term for President Obasanjo argued that the constitutional review process now underway has been characterized by manipulation and irregularities but predicted efforts to amend the constitution would ultimately fail. They worried that President Obasanjo would attempt to hang on in spite of the defeat and said that international support would be critical to ensure democratic elections in 2007. The group visited the U.S. Embassy as part of its outreach efforts to visit the G-8 embassies in Abuja as well as influence local opinion through the coverage of their efforts. As other Embassy interlocutors claim, this group remains fairly confident that the Constitution cannot be amended through legal measures but worry about the potential for unrest in the aftermath. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) A group of National Assembly members opposed to a third term for President Obasanjo met on April 24 with PolCouns at the request of the group. The members, part of the "2007 Movement," argued that the constitutional review process has been characterized by manipulation and irregularities. They listed their reasons for opposing a third term for President Obasanjo, including their concern about rising instability, deteriorating living conditions for the average Nigerian and manipulation of government's levers by "Obasanjo and his cronies." The Members represented at least three of Nigeria's political zones (Southwest, Southeast and Northwest) and the four largest political parties (AD, APGA, PDP, ANPP). In attendance were: Senators Saidu Dansadau, Olorunnibe Mamora, Yari Gandi and Representatives Aminu Tambuwal, Francis Amadiogwu, Cyril Maduabum, Uche Onyeagocha and Femi Gbajabiamila.

3. (C) The Assembly members predicted that efforts to lengthen the tenure of President Obasanjo will ultimately be defeated despite the manipulation of the process. "The entire nation is against it," one of the representatives from Lagos claimed. They claimed that 46 Senators opposed the amendments (with 38 needed to block the bills) and that 153 representatives also opposed the term extension efforts (with 120 needed to block the measure). The group requested USG understanding and support in the period following the vote on constitutional change, because, they predicted, the Obasanjo government will be unwilling to accept defeat.

4. (C) Senator Dansadau said that after the vote the political environment would heat up because President Obasanjo would employ alternate strategies to extend his stay in office. One strategy, he said, included fomenting more instability and declaring a state of emergency to extend his term. Another potential strategy could be the continued withholding of funds to the Independent Nigerian Election Commission (INEC), thereby preventing the logistical preparation for free and fair elections. Already evident, he said, is a clampdown on political opposition and intimidation of members opposed to his extension. He said that members of the National Assembly had been promised a "free ticket" for re-election if they support the third term. Another member pointed out that this implies a less-than free-and-fair election in 2007.

5. (C) The group argued that any blame for political shortcomings should rest squarely on the President. "Part of effective leadership requires an orderly succession plan," Dansadau said. Senator Gandi pointed out as well that the reforms now underway would continue and could be spearheaded by a similarly young and talented group of technocrats. "These reforms do not depend on one person," said Senator Gandi.

6. (U) Responding to a question, PolCouns explained that the USG supported the concept of executive term limits in the interest of institutionalizing democracy and opening political space. He pointed out that this allows for new leaders to be groomed, it supports the rule of law, and that a regular turnover of power ingrains and institutionalizes a democratic process. Press coverage of the visit the following day mistakenly attributed the comments to the Ambassador (who was in Washington at the time) and said that

the Ambassador and the USG had called for "regime change."
Otherwise, the event was covered widely but not prominently.

18. (C) COMMENT: The visit by the group of anti-third term National Assembly members was part of an outreach and advocacy campaign but was also aimed at confirming the USG position on the third term. The anti-third term elements in the National Assembly are increasingly confident that they have the numbers needed to block third term legislation in both the House and the Senate. Like many Nigerians, though, these senior politicians were seeking diplomatic support should the third term measure fail since they expect turmoil to increase in the absence of a clear alternative course of action from the President. And like many other Nigerians, they are concerned that that turmoil could provide an excuse to delay elections or worse.

FUREY